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Fine-tuning nursing students' assessments in a Trauma Elective Course

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As nurse educators, we are responsible for ensuring that nursing students have the ability to provide safe patient care to elicit the best outcomes for patients. A first and foremost endeavor that educators have to allow is giving students the theoretical knowledge and transferring that knowledge to the bedside through psychomotor skills. The teaching and development of psychomotor skills begins within in the first semester of the nursing program and this acquisition of knowledge, skills is progressively reiterated throughout the curricula. (Payne, C., Ziegler, M., Baughman, D., & Jones, J. 2015) There is a plethora of literature that addresses the stress experienced by nursing students and the impact this has on their learning. This stress accumulates and follows their clinical experience and these students shut down and are not fully confident in their psychomotor skills at the bedside. One of the important psychomotor skills needing more emphasis is the head to toe assessment and the capability to focus on that assessment. Students need to be proficient to understand the why's of doing a systematic assessment and also when to intervene appropriately in a complex situation. There are many ways that assists curricula in this competency such as simulation, flipping the classroom so clinical is brought to the didactic classroom, realistic unfolding case scenarios, and of course the hospital based clinical environment itself. For students to become competent and confident, a trauma elective course objective was to build this skill in a different systematic approach and bring the competency to a higher level. To "assess" is to evaluate or estimate the nature, ability, or quality of. This trauma elective course provided the student with the necessary psychomotor systematic approach tools to conduct a head to toe assessment. Ultimately, this reinforced and verified their confidence and ability to do a quality assessment. Therefore, the end result would be safe patient interventions and care. The trauma course elective was a two day eight hour course that focused on the trauma population but specifically focused on how this population was assessed for injuries. The A-I mnemonic and the trauma nurse assessment is the systematic approach in the trauma patients and this course provided the psychomotor skill station to have the opportunity to practice. The students participated in learning the A-I approach to assessing the patient throughout these two days. In the course the students were continually reinforced and practiced their assessment skills through a variety of teaching strategies. The teaching strategies used in the trauma course were critiquing ER videos for proper systematic assessments, group simulations, group case scenarios where the students practiced assessments. The students engaged the different modes of learning because assessment is the key to patient safety and providing holistic care. Even though this systematic A-I approach in the assessment was geared towards the trauma population in the course, the outcome was for the students to be proficient and become intimate with their ability to understand a thorough assessment. Evaluations of the course provided positive feedback to students learning and adapting this assessment model in their clinical setting. Further thoughts to embedding this type of assessment into other courses with could be relevant just for the mere fact of students needing continuous practice and students becoming comfortable at the bedside with these skills.

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